Backstabber

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Backstabber

by Hangsaman

Summary

Will is depressed and heartbroken after being gutted by Hannibal. After recovery, he decides that he has to go find Hannibal in Italy.

On the way to Palermo, he stops at Sicily to decide whether it's really a good idea to seek Hannibal. He ends up stumbling into who Will first thinks is Hannibal, but turns out to be Hannibal's twin brother, Henrikas. Will can't deny his attraction to Henri and the other is very open about his attraction to Will. Will, who has been questioning his sexuality while recovering in the hospital, gets a chance to explore, and falls into a sexual relationship with Henri.

But then he has to make a choice: is he going to stay with Henri, or is he going to go find Hannibal?

Notes

Idk I was gonna churn out a 3000 word fic about Will smacking into Hannibal's twin and falling into a relationship with him, and then going on to Palermo to find that Hannibal has also been having a good time, fucking Antony Dimmond—and then Will getting jealous as fuck.

The complete fic turned out to be 14000 words so I guess I got carried away. Enjoy!

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1

What was worse than the pain itself—the external pain, which was vast; more greater than I had ever felt before—was the fact that even after everything that had happened…the misfortune that was my life, I still thought of Hannibal not with hate, but with longing. The longing for a past that could've been different. A future where Abigail was still beside us.

Us.

I have to correct myself. There is no us. I'm all alone.

Recovering from the carving wound that I had been left with, meant that I had more than plenty of time to think, which was the last thing that I wanted to do. People came to visit—out of courtesy or whatnot. But of course, it was never the person that I wanted to see. Because it simply couldn't be.

Hannibal wasn't able to walk around like a free man anymore.

Jack—recovering from his own wounds, asked me a simple—yet—loaded, question.

"What are you feeling towards Hannibal, Will?" he asked, his voice tired and low—as if he already knew the answer—and was disappointed. "I need to know where you stand with him."

I hesitated—it took me a moment to think of an answer. We listened to my silence—until I realised that no answer was needed. A saner person would've immediately expressed repulsion to the person who had stabbed him—who was a killer of men and had done sadistic things to them. My silence had served as my answer, and it meant that I still wanted to go back to Hannibal. That I just knew that he wasn't done with me.

Jack sighed. "Take care, Will." he said, and then hung up.

When sleep was thoroughly exhausted, only then did I return fully to the subject of why exactly was I still drawn to Hannibal. The simple and obvious answer was that Hannibal had been right: we were just alike, and that we needed each other because we were the only ones in the entire world who could understand each other.

But what had I really envisioned when I had pretended to Hannibal that I was going to run away with him? I saw myself beside Hannibal, face-to-face as we had been so many times, his hands and mine drenched in the blood of a victim. I saw a smile creep up on Hannibal's lips.

I opened my eyes with a jolt, trying to sit up on my hospital bed—as if caught red-handed. And then came the crushing and overwhelming memory of Hannibal looking me in the eyes, running his hand on the side of my face; showing me a tenderness that I couldn't turn away from. The way how, after he had stabbed me, he had engulfed me with his body in an embrace, as I was leaking blood in between our feet.

What had I glimpsed in Hannibal's eyes, right before the moment when he had penetrated me with his knife?

Betrayal.

Love.

And how could I describe this feeling—this ache—that left me crying helplessly; that was so relentless and unbearable in its force?

Heartbreak.

*

It seems easy to berate yourself for the things that you didn't do—couldn't do—in the past. I beat myself up for how I had been so quick to give in to the pain that night, when Abigail had been taken away from me. It seems easy to think how I could've run after Hannibal, even with my guts hanging out and trailing behind me. I don't know what I would've done, even if I had been able to catch up to him. I think of myself, bleeding out on Hannibal's kitchen floor—the state of mind that I had been in. The screaming thoughts that I hadn't been able to say to him:

Don't go. Come back. Don't leave me. Don't leave me like this.

Could I have convinced him to change his mind had I said those words?

But maybe—*if*—I had been able to catch up to him, at least then, there might've been a possibility of Hannibal taking pity on me—he might've given me a coup de grâce—given me the option of not having to suffer, but to finally be allowed to die, at peace at last.

*

Even when I reach Italy, I'm not sure that I'm ready for it. Ready to see him. I'm sure that I want to, but I'm not sure that I'm ready for it. I've long since realised that I have a knack for doing things that aren't too good for me—but it's only now that I fully admit it.

But even admitting it doesn't get me to stop what I'm doing and rethink my plan. I should care what Jack would think. I should care what Alana would think. But I don't. Instead, I sail through seas on what could only be called a suicide mission.

But before Palermo—I stop in Sicily, to work out whether it is really wise for me to go to Hannibal.

I roam the streets in loose clothing and sunglasses. I realise how rigid I am. Sicily is abundant with bodies of waters—rivers, which lead to the Mediterranean Sea; or lively and vivid blue beaches. But I have no interest in wading the waters. I lazy around—think of Abigail, or Hannibal. I try to write. Sometimes I even fall asleep and wake with burnt skin. But the sun is undeniably doing me good. The laughter of old couples and youths fill my background—it's rubbing off on me. I start drinking too—cautiously, but enough to get a good buzz. The beach

during nighttime is unexpectedly and eerily quite—I lay on the sand, look up at the sea of stars. I wonder if Hannibal is looking at it too.

I chuckle: Hannibal has finally forced into an unlikely vacation.

Days pass: I wait for myself to get sick of sunshine; to build up the urge and courage to be on my way again.

*

When I finally turn around, I think: of course.

Of course I was to be caught unaware; vulnerable, with my back to him. Once again, he is the hunter and I the prey. The night sky doesn't help—I can tell that it's him, but I can't work out the details of his face. The face that had been haunting my dreams, the face that I had been longing to see.

I hadn't thought that when I'd find Hannibal—if, I'd find Hannibal—that it would be like this. I'd never thought he'd be in Sicily, even. Yet, what had I expected? I had expected a sudden burst of violence. So familiar: it was the language of our relationship. Or, I had expected words. But not this. What comes is a surprise, as is everything in regards to him. I can't quite clearly make out his face in the darkness. But it's near. And then it's very, very near. I feel myself smothered—I can't breathe. But only because I am being suffocated by his mouth on mine. It's a collision—I gasp and he takes this as a sign of reciprocation. His mouth is all-eager; his tongue is more so. Before I have the time or mind to do anything to make sense of the situation, I fall back into the sand, bringing him with me. He adapts to the loss of balance and heaves his body on top of mine, until we are chest to chest. His kiss is now relentless, and his hands wonder with determination. I come to my senses and seize him by the wrist. "Not here," I plead.

He peers into my face and immediately gets up, hauling me up by my hand. Without releasing it, he walks swiftly ahead, dragging me behind him. The touch of his hand in mine is too foreign—I think for a second that I'm making a mistake, that something bad is about to happen. That I will only turn up dead. But then again, I decide that I don't care.

There is a bike parked in a dark corner that Hannibal approaches. I almost question him on it—it's so far from his previous life. He puts the only helmet on my head—I have no time to protest as the engine roars, and he pulls me by the hand to mount behind him. As we glide through the breeze, I wind my arms around his middle and occasionally feel his hand rest on mine.

We arrive at what I can only call a luxurious brick house of a sort. It's an expensive-looking building—but I don't have time or light to process any other details.

Once again he takes my hand and leads me up to a room—his bedroom, I think. It's unfamiliar because there isn't any daunting-looking artwork hanging above his bed, or a skull of some animal adorning the walls. Immediately, he resumes the kiss wordlessly—his hands are almost too much to bear. I feel like I'm being invaded against my will, and it arouses me because the feeling is familiar and tied to Hannibal. I shakily manage to undo the top button

of his shirt, and try to kiss back with the same ferocity that he's showing me. No matter how hungry I had thought myself to be—he is hungrier, fiercer. Finally and without warning, he slides his hand into my pants and grabs my erection. It's too sudden—and I gasp. He moves his hand in an exploring motion—until I'm melting and feel my knees buckle. He pushes me onto the bed. "Wait," he says. I look around in confusion—my heart is thumping so fast I wonder if he's going to arm himself with a knife. But instead, he turns a lamp on. It's a dim, orange glow. "I want to see you," Hannibal says.

I don't want the lights on. I don't want him to see the scar he left me with—at least, not yet. I want this heated passion to last just a little longer—only then, do I want to talk.

I'm aware that I'm glaring at him as he comes back to me, but I can't help it. I watch as he strips me of my clothing, and then wait for him to notice the scar. It's too jarring to be ignored.

He throws my clothing carelessly onto the floor—I've never known Hannibal to be this messy.

He rises onto the bed, kneeling, and then hovers over me for another kiss when of course, he stops. He sits back on his heels, while I'm shamelessly flaunting myself naked in front of him. His eyes are grounded on the scar. It's turned into a deep mixture of something between red and purple. It will be a long time until it completely turns white. Hannibal lift a hand and traces a finger alongside the scar, and my breath hitches, wondering if he'd suddenly press his nail sharply into it. But instead he looks up at me asks: "What happened?"

I'm speechless, if a little furious. I want to scream but only a whisper comes out: "What do you mean what happened?"

Hannibal looks at me like I'm insane. Which, I guess I am, because I'm the one who actually came to Italy to find him. "What are you talking about?" he says.

"What—" I'm wheezing. "Is this your attempt at gaslighting me?"

He's still unmoving; stumped. "My dear, I haven't an idea what you're talking about,"

"My dear?" I yelp. "Don't you fucking call me that after what you did to me—to Abigail!"

Hannibal rises from his position and walks away—to turn on the lights of the room. Suddenly, everything is bright with white light—and I see him clearly for the first time. His hair is like straw—a dirty blonde, longer and unkempt. His skin, a golden brown. He looks beautiful, I think, but push the thought away. I gulp as I peek at the chest hair visible from where I undid his shirt. It isn't healthy of me to be lusting after him like this.

He draws near to me again, sits on the bed and tilts his head like I'm a fucking child who got lost.

"Say something, Hannibal!" I practically yell.

He looks surprised. “Hannibal?” he says. And then a smile creeps up on his lips, though it’s more of a smirk, as if he has everything figured out.

“What are you smiling about?” I say. I’m aware of how bratty I sound but I can’t help.

And then, he chuckles. He rubs a hand on his face like he can’t believe his luck. “So, he is alive.”

I stare back, the blood draining from my face. I sit up and peer at him. I lift a hand to his face, and he calmly watches me, lets me do what I want. I hook a thumb into his mouth, opening it enough to see that his teeth look different. The lines of his face are…different too.

I stutter to say the words: “W-who…are y-you?”

He smiles, and takes my hand. His thumb caresses at my skin. I almost flinch.

“Hannibal didn’t tell you he has a twin brother,” he says.

*

When I gain control of myself again—or, when I wake up, it’s already afternoon. I jerk up and find the bed empty. I kick the sheets away because of the heat and the motion brings on an anger which has been left boiling inside me for too long. The events of the night are coming back to me:

“Henrikas—but I go by Henri,” he had said. “Surely there was a reason he didn’t tell you,”

“He was probably withholding it to use it against me some day,” I said. And then something strange happened: I felt tears escaping from my eyes, silently. It hurt, and I was *tired.* It felt like I was being punished by Hannibal, *for* understanding and seeing him. Hannibal.

Did love hurt this bad?

Henri covered my nakedness with the bed sheets, and then I felt his arms—hesitant at first—close around me.

“He hurt you,” Henri said. Stated, as if he knew.

He wiped away my tears as I shuddered them out. He rubbed my back and whispered things to me I didn’t understand. But they sounded kind—like I had been needing to hear such words.

And then I grew so tired that he shifted me and laid me down to sleep. He turned the lights off—by then, dawn’s sky was streaming bluish light into the room. He arranged the sheets around me, and then caressed my head. I caught him by a sleeve as he tried to leave. “Stay,” I pleaded.

He considered for a moment but then nodded, and slid in beside me, cocooning my body in his. I cried a little more against his chest as he stroked the back of my head.

*

I don myself in a robe that has been left for me, I presume—it's linen and a creamy yellow, which I would've never chosen—and then descend the stairs barefoot to do what I don't know. To find Henri.

I look around at his belongings: similar in quality—they are worth a lot—but different in aesthetic. I stop at framed black-and-white photographs of men and boys among fishes. Even to the unartistic eye, they are captivating.

"Herbert List," Henri says behind me. "These were shot here in Sicily in the 1950s—men fishing for Tuna,"

I think of my fishing lures and gears; how Hannibal had framed me with them once.

"List had an eye beauty—" Henri says. "You look lovely in that,"

I turn around to face him, ready to be unaffected by him. But I have to take a step back. It's really like looking at Hannibal—if I don't try too hard to look.

"Hungry?" Henri inclines his head towards where I assume is his kitchen. I follow him, and anticipate what his meals would be like, compared to Hannibal's. I wonder if it's fair to Henri that I'm comparing him to Hannibal.

We pass the kitchen completely and step out into a garden of a sort, where the breakfast-slash-lunch things are waiting. Henri pulls out a chair for me to sit in, and then takes his place to my right. I catch myself before bombarding him with how good of a cook Hannibal is. But then I would also have to decide whether to tell him that Hannibal is a cannibal. Would Henri laugh and think that I'm telling a joke? I focus on what's in front of me instead. I look around at the table, rich with fresh cuts of fruits, jars of jams and honey. To be eaten with crepes, which I suspect Henri has made because I haven't seen another person in the house. There's a salad that looks like it's been freshly picked; and strong, heavenly coffee. The meal is weirdly meatless. Henri serves me first: again I recognise Hannibal in this gesture.

"I still haven't had the honour of knowing your name," Henri says.

Despite the situation, this makes me laugh. And then my heart drops at the way he's looking at me. Smiling at me, in affection. Eerie, to think that there was in some other universe, a possibility that Hannibal could look at me like that too.

"It's the most common name there is," I say.

Henri pops a slice of tomato into his mouth, and the way that he's looking at me again is somewhat concerning. He looks like he's gonna come up with something poetic to say about my name.

"It's Will," I tell him, finally.

"Will," he repeats. It breaks my heart to hear it in his voice, so similar to Hannibal's. And he notices this. He shows his concern by placing his hand on mine. He stares into my eyes until

I’m uncomfortable. “You’ve the most beautiful eyes I’ve ever seen,” he says. I feel myself grow hot on my face. “Hannibal is predictable only when it comes to beauty.” Henri says. “He likes to surround himself in it. You—are no exception.”

The food has turned to dry mush in my mouth, so I wash it down with coffee. I wish I had wine, instead.

“I’ve made you uncomfortable,” Henri smiles, finally lifting his hand away from mine. “Will you tell me about how you came to know him?” he asks, instead. He’s merciful.

I’m still trying to recover and can barely think straight (straight—yes. Funny. Hadn’t Henri and I kissed just the night before? Nothing about that had been straight).

“Maybe later,” I say, standing up. All of a sudden, I feel utterly naked with only a robe on. “I’d like to get changed.”

“Of course,” Henri smiles. I feel him watching me as I go.

*

Despite his well treatment of me; his enthusiastic comments and gestures, I’m a little concerned that Henri was only looking for a one night stand. I’m also—I know—am trying to run away from having to face the fact that I’ve kissed a man (and had liked it, haha).

My clothes from the night before are still on the floor in a messy pile. Hannibal would've already laundered and folded them if he was here. I don’t want to leave, but I want to. I have too many questions, so I stand in deep thought by the bed, unmoving.

The way Henri makes me feel sets off something in me. My body responded to it like it has been starving for his touch. I feel like I don’t deserve his kindness. That I’d be betraying Hannibal by making myself familiar with his brother.

I sigh and lower the robe, throw it on the bed.

Henri uses the same word I used the night before, when he had been trying to do the logical thing. “Stay,” he says, from the doorway.

I’m caught unaware again, butt naked. He has been watching me, getting dressed. But I surprise myself, because I don’t mind. I feel a thrill run through me—I know I’m gonna have to deal with it later—but I take my time bending over and let him watch, which he does.

When I’m fully dressed, I turn around to face him.

Henri approaches with a wary look in his eyes, until he’s close like he was the night before, when we had stood at the beach. There’s a part of me that wants to present my mouth to him again; and a part of me that wishes he will force himself on me.

But he only brings his hand to the side of my face—just like Hannibal did—I almost wince. “Stay a while, please,” he says. “Or as long as you’d like.”

I don’t need to consider. What if I'd actually found the version of Hannibal that I was going to be happy with; who wasn’t going to do bad things to me, like frame me for murder?

“I thought you were only looking for…” I don’t know why, but I feel like a teenager, fumbling. “sex.”

Henri smiles. “I noticed you—always alone.” he says. “Walking the beaches in contemplation.”

“You’ve been watching me?”

“I couldn’t turn my eyes away from the way the wind blew through your curls.”

I’m somewhat taken aback. “And you gathered I wouldn’t say no when you suddenly just came up to me and kissed me?”

“I had to take a risk,” he admitted. And then: “Will you stay?”

I nod and watch his smile grow. My heart leaps, unbelieving that I’d been the one to bring that smile on his face.

*

I had been expecting him to naturally lead us into continuing whatever we had stopped doing the night before. I was sure that I wanted it with Henri—but I wasn’t sure if I was supposed to be doing it. For the meantime, though, the decision was put off again.

“You came to Europe find him?” Henri asks.

I nod, as if guilty.

“Is he at…” he pauses. He hesitates but says: “home?”

“I’m sure I know where to find him,” I say.

“Ah,” he says. And then he looks away at the distance. “Strange. I was thinking of going to Florence soon. One ought to look at the real paintings once in a while.”

“Not Florence. Palermo.” I explain. “The Norman Chapel.”

I wait for him to say more. My heart thumps at the possibility of seeing brother and brother side-by-side, though I don’t know how to feel about it.

“Palermo is awfully close,” Henri says. “Why are you in Sicily?”

“Couldn’t make up my mind if I want to go to him…or run away from him.”

“He inspires that sort of emotion in everyone who crosses his path.” Henri states.

“Are you aware of…what happened?” I ask.

Henri regards me, raising his brows. He doesn't know anything. "No," he replies. "But I'm hoping you'll tell me."

"Are you sure you want to hear?" I ask because I'm pretty sure Henri has been trying not to meddle with Hannibal.

"You look like you need someone who can listen to you." He smiled.

*

People gawk at us—two grown men having drinks on the beach must be a rare sight. Or, maybe it's the way that Henri looks at me. Or the way *I* catch myself looking at him.

Henri's smile stumps me whenever I get the chance to look at him, because I can't stop thinking of Hannibal at the same time.

I discover that he's a painter—I'm not surprised. The Lecters are a talented family, I'm sure.

"How did you come to know him?" Henri asks.

I have to take a breath before I do anything—say anything. Henri is the first person in years who has no inkling of what Hannibal and I had done to each other—I feel the urge to tell him everything. I consider what order to go in, and fumble.

He reroutes his question for my sake—because I'm sure that I look distressed. I don't know how much time has passed, even.

"Tell me of your first meeting, then." Henri is great at asking questions. I wonder if he'd ever pursued psychiatry.

"Well," I begin. "I used to work for the FBI. So I guess I can say that we met through work."

I watch his surprised expression. I wait as if for permission to continue.

"One thing led to another and I ended up in prison—framed for…murders."

He's surprisingly calm at the absurdity of my words. So I back-track: "Hannibal can be very persuasive. You know that he's a psychiatrist?"

"The last I heard of him, he was a surgeon." Henri says. "The last time I met him—was around twenty years ago,"

"Oh." I say.

"Indeed." he says. "Please, continue."

"I was working as a profiler—catching killers. Serial killers. Hannibal was also consulted—recommended by one of our mutuals—and he also acted as my therapist at one point."

"Hmm,"

“I was…unstable.” I explain. “I happened to get sick with an autoimmune disease which caused hallucinations, lost time etc…” I pause as if for questions. But he’s intent on listening. “Made me highly susceptible for getting framed for murders. That Hannibal had committed.”

“Murders?” he says, but it’s more like he’s trying to process the information. He hasn’t even heard the worse. I haven’t even told him about the cannibalism.

I drop the anvil: “He also cannibalised people, and had guests unknowingly consume his dishes too.”

I expect Henri to rise from his chair and storm off, or do anything that a ‘normal’ person would do. But he stays, looks at the water as if his mind were wandering down a memory. It's a while before he speaks again. “And who is this Abigail?”

Her name strikes a dagger through my chest. “I caught her father—a serial killer. And killed him.” I say. “Hannibal and I sort of…became her fathers.”

I have to take a huge sip before I continue. “He killed her in front of me and left me bleeding on his kitchen floor.”

Henri’s eyes flicker to where my scar is, hidden under a linen shirt. Mercifully, he doesn’t ask why.

We walk to where I’m staying and I collect my meagre belongings. Without discussion, it’s already decided that I’m staying with Henri.

*

After dinner, we sit on a well-used couch in his rich living room, with a wine bottle in between us. Side-by-side, as apposed to face-to-face as I’d usually been with Hannibal. The way that his belongings are placed are the opposite of Hannibal’s ultra precise placements. Henri’s books are scattered everywhere at odd angles, some even facing open—which I think Hannibal would’ve itched to correct. Things aren’t placed haphazardly, but with a carelessness that’s beautiful in its unapologetic way. Henri has no one to impress; he has nothing to hide.

“Why do you want to find him?” Henri asks. What he means is why do I want to go after someone who has destroyed lives, and is on the run. “What do you see in him?”

I huff unsurely. The truth is muddled: at times I feel like I know exactly why I want to find him. At other times, I want to do what is right. “I don’t know.” It’s a weak response, I know.

Henri swirls his blood-red glass of wine. After everything I’ve told him, the final question he asks me jolts me to my core: “Are you in love with Hannibal?”

It feels like a punch to the gut. I avoid eye-contact, obviously uncomfortable, and expect him to change the subject. But he waits in the increasingly loud silence, his stare keen and pointed. It almost feels like he’s toying with me, and I recognise Hannibal in this. Again, just as with Jack, my lack of an answer seems to have provided one.

“I imagine he’s spared you because he wants to.” continues Henri. “He loves you in his own way and therefore must consider you an equal.”

I gulp down my own glass of wine, and refill it without shame.

“Means that you bear the burden of understanding him.” Henri says.

“Burden,” I say. “feels like an appropriate word.”

“It torments you to love him.”

Again, that word. I take another gulp of wine. I should be drinking straight from the bottle instead.

“Yet,” Henri’s hand slithers up to my neck, caressing. I don’t move away because I’m frozen with not knowing what to do. “Hannibal has yet to act on his love for you—in the literal sense.” His hand has now moved to my face, where his thumb traces my lower lip.

I try to blame the wine, but I desperately want to do this. I know that it’s dangerous to have sat so close to him.

Why he does it after what he said—I don’t know, but I don’t move away when he leans in to kiss me. Instead, I kiss back.

He makes the decision to take away the glass from my hand, and I find that I don’t mind. In the few seconds it takes for him to set our glasses down, I follow him with my eyes; imagining Hannibal in his place. There’s a panic that briefly passes through me. It’s my chance to move away, but I remain where I am. He returns his mouth to me again; pulls at me, clutches at me until I find myself facing him on his lap. I almost squirm out of his grasp at how strange I feel with my legs spread on either sides of him. The spell breaks—or tries to—when he pulls my shirt off and regards me. His fingers trace the scar tenderly on my belly; I watch his face and see Hannibal. Almost as if he had noticed that I was thinking of Hannibal, his mouth finds mine again, so that I can’t look at him anymore.

“We shouldn’t,” I manage.

He pulls away, looks at me with cloudy eyes. He wants to stop too, but he can’t. I contradict myself and close our mouths together again. My hand snakes down, and then up his shirt to explore through his chest. Unfamiliar territory: but I’m undeniably aroused. A voice tells me to stop; that this is wrong, and that I should be ashamed. A moan escapes from my mouth as he kisses my neck.

I don’t know what’s in my demeanour that makes him act the way that he does, in regards to me. And I don’t know what makes me behave the way that I do, in regards to him. He kisses me passionately, and I wonder if I’d ever kissed a strange like this before—though he’s not really a stranger. He’s Hannibal.

No, he’s not—I think—and then he snatches me up, carries me easily up the stairs—I flinch at the unfamiliarity. All my life I had fulfilled the role of the dominant male—and here I was,

being handled as if I was the one to be careful with. He sets me down in front of the bed, kisses me again; clutches at my waist—and then his hands lower down to greedily grab at my ass and I jolt from the contact. It's easier to pretend that he's someone else—someone who's not Hannibal—in the dark room. I let him undress me—let him look as much as he likes. He pushes me onto the bed gently, and lets me look as he undresses himself. I feel my heart is going to explode. He crawls to me—I see his heavy erection hanging in between his legs; I feel a thrill run up my spine—he spreads my legs with his knees. And when he looms over me—something awakens in me. A realisation that maybe—I like being handled in bed, more than the other way around.

He pays attention to every inch of my skin—licks and traces at my various scars—but doesn't expect anything in return—he knows that it's my first time with a man. "Alright?" he asks me. I nod, impatiently aching between my legs.

His hand—so big, I marvel—circles around my erection. I quiver because he's good at it. I groan and almost finish when he leans down and takes me in his mouth. I look down and make out the curve of his lips—think of Hannibal—and come so violently I cry out. Henri doesn't spill—just like I imagine Hannibal would.

A sudden clarity strikes me. Was this really supposed to happen? When Henri leans in for a kiss again, I give in, but don't kiss back. I don't have the heart to tell him that I feel like I've betrayed Hannibal. Of course—he notices—and understands. The way that his hairs falls into his eyes, it's hard to tell what he's really thinking, but he withdraws wordlessly and lays down by my side. We stay silent as we catch our breaths and stare at the ceiling. I don't know what to do, and tears are attacking me; rising up like a tide from somewhere within me. I try to keep my voice steady as I ask for permission to use his shower.

"Of course," he answers.

The gushing and violent spray of the shower helps a little; yet, I can't seem to stop my chest from heaving with silent sobs. Because it hurts. I feel guilty. I also feel like I've taken advantage of Henri—pulled him into my mess of a world. There's a panic in me—if Hannibal finds out—is Henri going to end up dead?

When I finally exit the shower, the room is still mercifully dark but I can tell that Henri is fully dressed. He sits on the edge of the bed with his head down, as if in mourning. When he notices me, he stands up to leave. "Good night," he whispers, and takes a few steps towards the door.

"S-stay?" I ask. I pretend to myself that I don't know why, but I know. I want to be comforted—and forgiven—the memory I have of his embrace from the night before has left me aching for more. Who knew that physical touch could be so therapeutic? And then I feel guilty again—because I'm essentially using Henri for my whims. I almost speak—I almost tell him to never mind, but he turns back and approaches me. He takes the soaked towel away from me, and then presents me with sleepwear.

He keeps his distance when we finally lie down. Selfishly, I shift closer until my body is plastered to his—until he has no choice but to fling an arm around me. I clutch at the fabric on his chest, feel the tears returning again. "I'm sorry," I blurt out.

He shushes me. “It’s not your fault,” he says.

Chapter 2

Unlike the day before when I woke up alone, this time Henri is still in bed with me. I'm turned away from him and he's spooning me—I can feel his stubble prickly at the back of my neck. The warmth of his body against mine is heavenly—I never want to move again. His arm that's flung around my waist feels possessive: his hand is over mine, moving back and forth in small caresses. What had I ever done to deserve this?

Eventually, he senses that I'm awake, and props himself up on an elbow, trying to peer at my face. He pokes me on the shoulder playfully. "Will?" he says—my name on his tongue still stings. It brings to mind how Hannibal had already started calling me Will during our first meeting.

"Hungry?" he asks.

And of course, this also reminds me of Hannibal and how he always urged to feed me.

"Just a little longer please." I ask, selfishly. I know it's sending the wrong message to Henri. It must be confusing him. Do I want him or his brother? But then again, is Henri even that fond of me, considering I'm pursuing his serial killer of a brother?

He settles back against me, hand returning to mine.

*

Again when my eyelids flutter open—I haven't realised how tired I had been—Henri is still there. It's almost shocking to me—and it's almost shocking that I had been wanting him to stay by me. This time, I'm nuzzled against him, as he's sitting up and…he flips close a sketch pad. I don't want to flatter myself but I fear that he's been drawing me.

"Can I see?" I ask.

"Only if you promise I won't have to burn it."

I laugh. Why would he want to keep a sketch of me? "Okay," I say, vaguely.

He's watching me mischievously, smirking.

"Okay—I promise." I say, sitting up. He opens to his interrupted work and hands it to me.

There was several studies of my sleeping face, surrounded by my curls, which are drawn with the most detail. He seemed to have fixated on that.

I marvel at his skill for so long that I snap to reality and wonder why he's still keeping me around. I hand the pad back to him. "How do you not hate me?" I ask.

"Hate is a strong emotion," he replies. "Requires more than anything we've done so far."

“Then…what do you feel about me?”

He licks his lip and shakes his head. “I think my actions speak for themselves.”

Lust. Lust, right? Though I’m far from being desirable.

I stay silent, and he takes this as a sign to explain further: “I’m old enough to not play games. When a chance presents itself, I try to be honest as possible. So here’s the simple truth: I’ve only known you for two days—yet, I feel captivated by you.”

The answer is too much. Why did I even ask?

“I hope that answers your question.” Henri concludes.

I don’t know if I’m expected to answer.

But Henri is merciful, as always: “Perhaps you can think on that.” he says.

I remain frozen where I am, caught in this unlikely situation. I want to ask him if he means he wants me to not go to Hannibal, and to remain with him. But it’s too immodest a question. We’ve only known each other two days.

“Let me make you something to eat,” Henri says, and rises up from bed.

*

This time there are eggs and sausages. I wince at the memory of the first time Hannibal fed me. I must have looked quite depressed because Henri brushes his fingers against my cheek and says: “Have I ruined the mood by saying too much?”

“Umm—” I reply. “No, just…thinking.” An answer, but not an answer at all.

“What are you thinking of?” Henri says, ever patient.

I contemplate, staring at the swirl of the coffee mug I’m mixing. Henri stops me by placing his hand on mine. “Do you want me to be honest?” I ask.

“Honesty is always ideal,” he says. He twirls a pencil in one hand, and I focus my eyes on that.

“Even if it hurts someone?” I ask.

“Are you going to hurt me?”

I scoff. “I don’t have the power to hurt you. All I’m capable of doing is probably more of a… mosquito bite than a sting.”

Henri chuckles. His straw-coloured hair reveal different strokes of gold and brown in the setting sun. “Oh, but you underestimate yourself, Will.” he says.

I look at him a little harshly, frowning.

“And you don’t know how beautiful you are.” He admits.

I pretend that the hair in my eyes are bothering me so I can hide my face with a hand. “What are you suggesting I do?”

He sighs, and takes my hand away from my face. He drags it down to the table and keeps it held down. “Hannibal…is dangerous.”

I know that much is true. “I’ve never known myself as well as I know myself when I’m with him.” I confess.

Henri’s eyes are almost cold when I look back at him.

I continue: “Hannibal—has always tried to nurture that part of me that is violent. I’m not good for you.”

“You’re only good for Hannibal, you mean.” Henri says, almost bitter. “And after everything that he did to you—you still want to go to him?”

“I guess in some sick, twisted way—we deserve each other.”

“Why then, did he leave you…like he did?”

“I made a mistake. He was supposed to leave without me—but he waited, because I’d betrayed him.” I say. “I Realised too late that I did want to run away with him.”

Henri nods. He sets down the pencil and stands to leave, taking his plate with him.

*

When I’m finally able to finish everything on my plate, I return to the house—I don’t exactly know what to do, but I conclude that it’s high time for my departure. Leaving without a goodbye is horrendously rude—but that’s the way things has turned out. I go up to pack the little belongings that I have, and contemplate on writing a note to Henri, thanking him for his hospitality—and apologising for intruding on his life.

I undress as slow as possible—hoping to repeat yesterday’s scene, but Henri doesn't show up. I sigh as if in disappointment, and decide to sprawl on the messy bed completely naked—in a shameful attempt at seduction. I don’t even know why I’m doing it. I try to figure out my intentions—but enough time has passed. I wonder what Henri is doing. He must be working —but then, a chill crawls up my spine.

It’s an absolutely absurd thought—but what if Hannibal has been here all this time, spying on us? What if he has Henri now and—

I throw some clothes on and dash down the stairs, whisk in and out of unfamiliar rooms. He’s nowhere to be found. Panic is setting in—until I smack right into him, coming out of a room. The drink that he has in his hand shatters to the floor at my feet.

Instantly, Henri tries to push me out of the way but I'm already stepping into the broken pieces of glass. My heart races as I hear Hannibal's voice in my head—the shattered teacup.

I stand frozen in the mess, looking down at the blood slithering out of a gash in my heel.

I feel Henri's hands at the sides of my arms. "Come," he says, and lifts me away from the mess, into the living room.

"I'm sorry," is all I can say.

"No need to apologise," he tells me. He sets me down on the couch, where he casually takes his shirt off, bundles it up and presses it firmly to the cut; guides my hand to it while he vanishes.

He returns with rubbing alcohol and bandages. I think of wintery nights, and injured Buster's whimper. Randall Tier…and Hannibal bandaging my knuckles.

He kneels on the floor and brings the swab to the cut. "This is going to hurt," Henri tells me.

I nod, and silently watch him work. His artist's hands, steady and meticulous. Just like Hannibal.

He's still shirtless, and I can't remove my eyes from his chest. Maybe it's the brilliant sight of blood that has me all worked up. On an impulse, I bend down and kiss him on the lips. He doesn't move away—perhaps simply from shock. I take a breath and kiss him harder, to which he finally responds. I place my hands on his chest and run them through the hair.

"Will—" he interrupts, breaking the kiss.

I draw back. I remind myself: no means no.

"Let me finish this," he says instead, completely ignoring my obvious erection. It's right there in his face. I feel an anticipatory thrill as I wait for him to finish.

But he's adamant in denying me. "What happened just then?"

I've almost forgotten why I was injured in the first place. "Nothing," I say, replacing my hand on his shoulder. I caress his face and run my thumb on his lips, which curl with a smile.

"Tell me," he says.

"Do I have to?"

"Please."

"Was just…panicked." I say. "This might sound crazy, but I thought Hannibal was here and probably doing something dreadful to you when you didn't come up."

A sweet smile graces Henri's face. I realise that I'd just admitted that I care what happens to him. "I know I'm crazy." I insist, but he leans up to me and kisses me. His hands come up to

my face to hold it the way he likes it—this feels more urgent than ever. I find myself on my back on the couch—and Henri on top of me. Flashbacks from the night before haunt me—and him too. He stops a moment. “Are you sure you want to…?”

Something like remorse is stinging at me now. “I can’t promise I won’t go back to Hannibal,”

He nods, understanding. “If this were our last time like this, it would be enough for me,” he says, a little sadly.

“You’re not possessive, like Hannibal.” I point out.

“People aren’t…possessions.” he says. “Are you going to be okay?”

“What do you mean?”

“Part of your panic yesterday has to do with…your uneasiness with going to bed with a man, no?”

He’s asking if we should get under cover of darkness. But I shake my head. A sinful thrill runs through me; shoots up in my groin. “Can I suck you off?” I choose crass words to shock.

He raises his brows and laughs, caught off-guard. I reach down and cup his erection firmly—the first time I’d done this, and it feels right. He inhales sharply from my touch and closes his eyes as if to consider.

“As a thank you for taking care of me,” I joke, tightening my hold.

“Let’s see if you can handle it,” he says. “But know that you can stop anytime,” he reassures me. I lean in to kiss him again, and at the same time, I lower his pants. I’m still kissing him when I take hold of his cock with my bare hand.

I get him to sit as I kneel, and almost tell him to look away.

When I do finally run my tongue over his cock, I imagine Hannibal looking down at me instead. I widen my mouth and lean in deep. I try to imagine what would make Henri feel good. I try to imagine what would make Hannibal feel good. I imagine Hannibal leaning back helpless as I take him apart like this.

“You’re so beautiful,” Henri says, his hand in my hair. I ignore him. It only makes me more vicious.

Henri is kind enough to warn me when he’s about to come. My own erection is rampant, and in a rush, I tell him that I want him to come in my mouth. Before he has a chance to decide otherwise, it’s already happening. I swallow obediently, and look up to see Hannibal.

Before I know what’s happening, Henri has gotten up and lifted me onto the couch, to lie on my back. He’s impatient—I think he’s forgotten who he’s with—and pulls down my pants; takes my cock in his mouth. I can’t keep from groaning at the relief. He’s kept me on edge for quite a while, and he’s an expert at this, so it doesn’t take long until my hips are arching into his mouth. But then he does something I hadn’t been expecting. He swiftly lifts my legs away

from me—exposing me, to move his mouth further down, under my balls; to the most forbidden part of my body. All I can do is swear because it turns me on. I imagine Hannibal running his tongue like Henri is now, before he fucks me with only his spit.

Henri's still working his tongue—and then he worms one hand to circle around my cock. He jerks me off—it feels like only a few moments have passed before I feel him tighten his grip more, and I come all over myself. I'm breathing like I've been running; my head is spinning. Henri rises from his position and gently stoops over me; licks the come from my chest.

"Holy fuck," I say. It's all I can say.

Henri just smiles.

*

"Tell me about your childhood," I say. The subject feels inappropriate—we're naked and sticky, spent from our recent activities. It also feels inappropriate because really, what I'm really asking to know is what Hannibal was like, as a child.

Henri has no illusions to what I want. "There was always rivalry between us," Henri says, a bitter-sweet smile on his lips. "Parents always have favourites—but Hannibal and I didn't care which one of us was more favoured. At least, not by them."

"By Mischa." I say.

Henri chuckles. "Yes," he clears his throat.

"She passed away." My interest is peaked.

Henri sighs. "Hannibal was how he is now long before Mischa."

"What was he like?"

Henri's watching my face in curiosity, and in this moment, he is like Hannibal.

"Gifted, intelligent, strange…like you never could predict what he was thinking about, or what he could surprised you with. In my youth when I first started gaining attention with my paintings—he took it upon himself to show me that he could paint too." Henri looks at me, as if wondering if I knew what he was talking about. He fishes out his phone from his discarded pants on the floor and googles something, then hands me his phone. "Only, his medium was not paint. It was people."

I look at the image, a man and a woman arranged amongst flowers, in such a way that you could only call it…art. It was beautiful, like a Botticelli.

"You knew this was Hannibal—but didn't report him?" I ask.

"I had to distance myself from him,"

"Why didn't you turn him in?"

“Hannibal has always loved art, but I could be wrong if Il Mostro was really him.” Henri says. “And—he *is* my brother.”

I sigh.

“Do you have a brother?” he asks.

I shake my head.

Henri shrugs his shoulders. “Perhaps this is my way—this is how I express love for my brother.”

“You can sleep at night knowing he’s killed innocent people—and will continue to do so?”

“I can—and so can you,” he points out.

It’s the bitter truth. Hannibal takes lives, and apparently that hasn’t tormented me as much as it should. Or otherwise I wouldn’t be here, on the way to find him.

“Did you ever try to go back home? To Lithuania?” I ask, out of curiosity.

“I can’t go back because of the same reason he can’t. Best not to dwell where old ghosts may come back to haunt.”

“He’s tainted your home for you.”

Herni sighs, and nods.

*

All I feel is nervousness when Henri offers me to penetrate him. I turn hot around the cheeks, because I had been thinking about it. Thinking how it would feel to do it to Hannibal, and to let Hannibal do it to me.

“Of course, we don’t have to,” Henri says, kindly. There’s no malice in his words.

“Why are you…doing this for me?” I ask.

Henri laughs. He has a look in his eyes that are amused at my innocence. “What makes you think that I wouldn’t enjoy it too?”

Oh.

He leans in to kiss me again, as we had been doing for the past five minutes. The days have been passing where it seems like all we do is talk and kiss. Kiss until it becomes too much, until we have to do something about it. And when the thirst is quenched, we talk again.

When we do finally get to the point where Henri is comfortable enough, I’m strangely calm and focused. Henri looks dazzling with his damp hair strewn across his forehead. I watch the jutting bones that outline his face, the curves of his lips move to form a gasp as I penetrate

him. A tiny noise escapes from him as I push deeper—I wonder what Hannibal would sound like if I did this to him.

“You need not hold back, Will.” Henri assures me.

I quicken the pace to my liking. I lean down and hungrily kiss him. I bury my face in his chest and take in the smell of it. I’m at the brink of coming but I need to get closer. I need to feel more skin. I need to feel how it would feel if Hannibal fucked me.

“Would it be weird if I asked you to fuck me between my thighs?” I ask, cowardly avoiding eye-contact.

I sense Henri nodding, and when I glance at him, he looks like he's trying to figure out my train of thought. But I immediately pull out of him before he can ask a question. He lifts himself up and I turn away from him, kneeling on all-fours as he lubricates me between my thighs. I want it to be feral, like how I imagine Hannibal would be like. Unrelenting in his taking of me. Tinged with violence.

Henri slides up to me. I feel his cock protrude and settle between my thighs. I tighten my legs.

“Don’t hold back,” I tell him.

He starts slow at first but thrusts harder until I hear obscene sounds from our skin slapping against each other. I touch myself—it’s almost too much. But not enough. I take one of his hands that are on my hips to wrap around my throat. I push down on his fingers to indicate that I want to be choked. Henri takes the cue and tightens his hold.

I think of Hannibal telling me that I’m his, as he chokes me and fucks me. I don’t even have to touch myself to come. It’s happens suddenly and violently—I can’t breathe and it feels like the most intense orgasm I’ve ever had. I almost say Hannibal’s name.

Henri comes immediately after. He doesn’t ask me to explain, but I avoid his gaze because I know he’s trying to see what I’m thinking about.

*

And then the day comes when I feel impatience tingling in my bones; the sudden thought that it’s time to leave. Henri—despite my many protests—insists on coming with me to Palermo.

“I don’t need protection,” I urge. “I can look after myself.”

Henri shamelessly places his hand under my chin. “Please,” he says. “I enjoy your company, and insist on enjoying it to the very end until you’re snatched from my hands.”

This doesn’t sound sustainable at all.

“Okay,” I reply.

Chapter 3

I've become too comfortable with Henri—I catch myself looking at him, observing him; leaning into him—and catch people looking at me, looking at him. Sometimes I wonder what Hannibal would do if he saw me looking at Henri like this. Was Hannibal capable of such a trivial emotion as jealousy? And if so, what would he do about it?

It's then that I realise I've made a grave mistake. If Hannibal finds out about Henri and I… he's certainly going to kill Henri. And eat him.

The train trudges on—I decide that I'd have to persuade Henri to go back to Sicily once we get to Palermo.

*

Henri—not unlike his brother—is well-versed in reciting bits and pieces of Palermo's history to me. I listen—because I want to. We don't immediately rush over to why we had come here—and I don't feel like he's slowing me down at all. Instead, we dine richly on wines and pastas over romantic candle-light; sip on bitter espressos afterwards. He's chosen a hotel for us that's outrageously expensive-looking and I sigh because this is exactly what Hannibal would have done. Henri's hand is constantly always in contact with some part of my body, and it's strange that sometimes I don't even notice. As much as I've come to enjoy his company (and his touch), there's a part of me that is eager to sabotage this idyll. With him, my guard is down. There are no surprises.

I'm also not surprised when I discover that there's only one bed.

His sketchbook that he always has on himself—that I pry out of his inside jacket pocket when he's showering—is filled with studies of my face and my limbs. There's also one of my torso—the scar vibrant in its detail. I don't know how to feel. This observant part of Henri is so completely similar to Hannibal that sometimes I have to wonder if I'm going crazy again, and maybe I've been with Hannibal all along—maybe he'd somehow fooled me into this weird vacation.

I replace the sketch book back to its place just in time as Henri comes out of the shower. He's only wrapped in a towel and his hair is carelessly tousled. I smile and he approaches me—looks at me deeply, until I realise that he's trying to kiss me, and succeeds. I let him do it because I can't even bring to stop myself. He grips me by the waist hard, as if I might run away—and pries my mouth open with his tongue. And then I snap back to the situation. It feels wrong to indulge myself when I feel Hannibal so near—so I push him and his hard-on away from me. Henri is Henri, so he doesn't push. He smiles and understands, and kindly states that I must get rest.

*

I'm standing at the foyer of Hannibal's memory palace. There's the skull graven on the floor that he had told me about: a single reminder of mortality. I don't act as if the vastness of the

place doesn't impress me. It's undeniably breath-taking—it makes you feel like a smudge on the face of the earth. That all of this, all of life, is nothing. I crane my neck upwards and stare at the decorated ceilings—I imagine it cracking and falling down on me. What will it feel like to be buried at last?

Henri is beside me—this must be a treat for him. But mainly he's looking at me, looking at the chapel.

"What?" I say, jokingly.

"What will you do—when you finally see him?" He asks.

"I'm not decided yet," I say. "I have to see him first—look at him. Hear his voice."

*

I spend the next days revisiting the chapel again and again, as if trying to convince myself of something.

Sometimes I feel Hannibal with me, sometimes I don't.

Henri accompanies me or doesn't, and it never bothers me. I don't feel like he's breathing down my neck, unsocial creature that I am. We're in harmony together; decisions are made wordlessly.

But the faithful day comes when I feel my heart almost stop. I feel the blood run out of my face. I'd come here to find Hannibal—and yet, when presented with his presence, I stand frozen in disbelief. I'd vaguely known that I would be caught by surprise—because Hannibal was full of surprises, wasn't he? I had imagined myself suddenly turning sharply to catch him out of the corner of my eye, in deep observation of me.

I hadn't imagined spotting him out and about, casually—with a book held to his side, and…

A man walking in tow with him. Bearded, dark and curly-haired. They seem to be on good terms. My first reaction, surprisingly, is anger. And then—jealousy.

I don't know what to do. I can't possibly run after him. What if he doesn't want to see me? What if…that man had already long ago come to entirely replace me?

Henri catches me staring into the distance at the walking men. "You look pale," he comments, and then follows my gaze. It's admirable how calm he is, how little he changes. In fact, his expression doesn't change at all, except to show concern for me.

Unexpectedly, I say: "Do you think they're…"

I don't know how to say it. *Fucking?*

Henri observes them a little longer. It's completely plausible that they're merely acquaintances. But right before they turn a corner and completely vanish, Hannibal lifts a hand and places it around the other man's hip—possessively.

Henri doesn’t need to tell me the answer.

I feel like I’m gonna faint for some reason, so Henri drags me back to our hotel.

He guides me onto the bed and goes away, hands me a drink of whiskey in consolation. I knock it back in one go, but don’t ask for more. I know what I want to do.

He’s about to speak—as if to comfort me, but I pounce on him. I secure his face with my hands and kiss him viciously. He lets it happen—merely because I’ve been dodging his advances since we arrived in Palermo. He’s kind enough to pretend that this has nothing to do with the fact that I'd just seen Hannibal with another man, and that I feel like my heart is about to break into a million pieces.

I rip his clothes off of him—it happens really fast.

I know he’s watching my face in awe. I know he’s transfixed by my raw anger, and what Hannibal brings out in me. Mercifully, he doesn’t try to talk or console me. He doesn’t mind when I become frantic and rough; he holds me and soothes me when I cry into his neck after I come. And he doesn’t resent me for it.

*

I wake up to the sun flooding into the room—it’s almost noon. Henri is still asleep. It seems that we’d managed to tire ourselves out quite thoroughly.

After what I’d done to Henri, I gather that he’d appreciate some time away from me. I imagine—when he wakes up—that my presence would suffocate him. Maybe he’ll finally come to his senses and question himself on why he’s allowed himself to keep me around for so long.

My destination—of course—is the Norman Chapel. It feels like I can spend countless amounts of hours in deep contemplation there—mulling over losses and what not. I wonder about the people who come here, and am slightly envious of their blind devotion; that they have something to believe in. Unlike me, whose head and heart is only filled with Hannibal.

As I walk, I realise that this is my last visit; that I have to finally come to a decision, because Hannibal was supposedly thriving without me. I would have to decide whether to go back to the States—or? I don’t have a choice, I remember. No way Henri is going to ask me back. And even then—would I want that life?

When I reach the chapel, though, it’s buzzing with people who don’t look like they belong here. People running in and out in a hurry; people belonging to law enforcement. I know better than to interfere, but I can’t seem to resist it. I manage to sneak in and see a crime-scene: the last thing that I had expected to see here. The crime-scene workers haven’t yet finished covering the thing that is propped on swords, on the floor right where the skeleton is.

I make out its shape—a life-sized human heart, made unmistakably out of glistening skinned flesh and bone. I can see where the body was bent and broken; how the muscles have been morphed to adopt the shape.

I almost close my eyes to interpret the evidence. But then I realise that I don't have to. I know this killer very well. He sent me his broken heart.

Which means, that he knows about Henri and I.

I look away from the crime scene and find a bearded man who seems to not be a part of the local police. He has some files in his grip, and he's watching me closely, as if he recognises me. He starts approaching me—a determined look on his face—but someone asks him a question and he has to stop. I see my chance to escape.

*

I know Hannibal is well out of Palermo, because he wouldn't risk himself like that.

I go back to the hotel knowing Henri is safe, but have to think about how I'm gonna break the news to him. He's dressed and sitting on the balcony, sketch pad in hand, looking kind of distracted.

"There's been a murder," I tell him. His face doesn't change much. "I felt Hannibal. It's him."

"Oh," he says, raising his brows.

"Henri," I say. "I've dragged you into my mess for too long. I—I think it's time we part our ways. I need you to go back because it isn't safe for you to be around me anymore."

He doesn't look too alarmed.

"I know where to go from here. I know where to find him. And I'm gonna do it alone."

"Hmm," Henri looks away. "What if…what if I tell you…" he says, then thinks again. "What if I asked you not to go to Hannibal?"

My heart drops.

"You said you haven't decided how you feel about him, until you see him. You can stop yourself before you see him." he stands, places both his hands on my shoulders. "Come back to Sicily with me, Will. Hannibal will only bring more bloodshed. Forget him."

"I…can't," I say.

"Why?"

"I don't know."

Henri strokes the side of my face. "Look me in the eyes and tell me you love him, then." he says.

"I…" Love is too light a word for what I feel for Hannibal. "Henri…you have to understand that I have to do this for myself. I have to see him and decide what I'm gonna do."

Henri regards me coldly; silently.

“I have to do what is right. And what feels right to me is that I go find him.” I say. “I have to do this alone.”

He drops his hands. I feel a sigh shake his body. He nods.

*

This time—I’m surprised to find that Hannibal’s back is the one that is turned to me.

Backstabber. The word invades my mind. Unconsciously, I find my hand sliding into my pocket for an imaginary knife. Hannibal is seated on a bench facing Primavera, recreating it on paper. The hand that holds the pencil pauses abruptly, and he raises his head, sensing my presence. I’d imagined—for a split second just a moment ago—that there would be no fight; that I would slip in to sit beside him, peacefully watching him draw. But he shuts his sketch pad and stands to regard me.

The sight of him nearly knocks the wind out of him. I see shadows; traces of Henri’s features mirrored in Hannibal’s face, and I think…I know this face. I have kissed those lips. The silence between us is almost dreamlike. I imagine we could stay like this forever, comfortably ignorant of what’s to come. Until, Hannibal speaks:

“Hello, Will.” he says. I can’t tell if he’s glad to see me or not.

“Hello, Dr. Lecter,” I reply, which catches him off-guard. I see him thinking about the time when we had first greeted each other with prison bars between us.

“Did you leave me your broken-heart in Palermo?” I ask, cutting to the chase. I know it was him, and Hannibal knows I know.

“You knew where to look for me,” Hannibal says.

“I’m wondering if you did it only because I let someone else see me.” I say. “Have I broken your heart? After you left me to die?”

Hannibal—after what I’ve suspected he’s been doing—has the gall to look betrayed, yet again. It feels strange, to look upon that expression on his face again, but without Abigail’s and my blood smeared on it. He sees clearly what Henri and I have been doing. His face twitches for a split-second, as if in annoyance: Why him and not me?

Hannibal sighs. “I have done things to you that cannot be forgiven—but I have come to realise how much I need you, Will.” Hannibal admits. “When I saw you in Palermo—I wanted you to know that I would give you my heart.”

“Do you feel betrayed?” I ask, pretending to ignore the profound things that were coming out of his mouth. So much of our words have been coated with violence and angst—that it was almost impossible to absorb words that were spoken not in malice, or manipulation.

Hannibal shook his head. “I feel hurt—but I understand that I am in no position to feel betrayed.”

I feel the old familiar feeling of having power over Hannibal like this. The power to hurt him.

“Henri provided me comfort when you couldn’t.” I twist the knife further. “Didn’t.”

There is no questioning on my part now, because it’s written clearly on his face: he’s heartbroken.

Heartbroken not to have been the first one to possess me in that way. I can feel him already setting into motion his plans of what he wants to do; how he wants to eliminate Henri. How he will manipulate me into thinking that eliminating Henri had been our mutual decision.

Just then, I hear footsteps behind me—I ignore it, because we’re in a museum. But Hannibal’s eyes have turned alert; something like a fire is burning in them. With rage. His breathing changes too.

I turn around to see none other than Henri.

“Hannibal,” Henri says. I don’t know what he thinks he’s doing but I feel the way I did when I realised that Hannibal was going to kill Abigail.

“Henrikas,” Hannibal replies. His accent has changed.

“What are you doing here?” I say. “Did you…follow me?”

“Will,” Henri says. His eyes land on me, soaking up my image. I can see affection and longing behind them. “Don’t.” he warns.

I understand what he means. He means don’t go back to Hannibal.

But what makes him think that we would both be alive if I accepted him over Hannibal?

Hannibal speaks in a language I have no grasp of. Henri speaks back and it looks like they’re having a petty fight over a girl. I almost chuckle out loud, when I notice a glint of a blade near Hannibal’s hand.

“Hannibal—!” I say. “Stop.” I know it’s rude to interrupt—and for all I know, they could be fighting over some disagreement from twenty years ago but Hannibal falls silent. “You’re not hurting anyone.” I tell him. “No one is getting hurt today.”

“Will—” Henri pleads, but Hannibal shuts him down.

“The decision is in your hands, Will.” he sneers. “*You* have to decide who you want.”

Oh god. This is the greatest dilemma of my life. Yet, I know that my mind had already been set when I decided to sail to Europe.

I turn my face to Hannibal. “I came here to find you,” I say. “And now that I have—” I watch his face hang onto my words. I recall the words that he had said to me moments before—how true they had felt. “I need you too. I don’t want to free myself from you.” I conclude.

“Because we’re conjoined,” Hannibal says, and then darts his gaze to land on Henri coldly.

Henri looks defeated—but he sees that he has to accept the truth.

I look back to Hannibal—the knife that I know he holds in his hand so expertly out of view—is still there, ready. His eyes burn into Henri.

“Hannibal—” I say, moving a little closer than I would have liked to. I whisper: “I forgive you.”

A change comes into Hannibal’s face, at last; his eyes sparkling with tears.

“But I need you to promise me one thing,” I say.

Hannibal doesn’t reply. He waits until my condition is spoken into existence.

“I need you to spare Henri. No matter what.”

Hannibal takes a few steps ahead, until he is so close that I have to step back. I don’t know what else he hides in his pockets; what surprises he has up his sleeves. I refuse to be gutted a second time. I refuse to be the fool for the second time. He shows me his hands, palms up. “I won’t hurt you, Will.” The softness of his voice almost sways me to believe him; but I’m wary to the point of paranoia.

I watch him and wait, as if for a better proof that he’s really unarmed. But he does nothing, and finally—he understands that I won’t let him come any closer. He looks hurt, again.

“Promise me, Hannibal.” I repeat.

He nods once. “I promise, Will.”

When I look back to Henri—he looks heartbroken. “I’m sorry,” I say. All he does is provide me with a broken smile, and it speaks for itself. He walks towards me until he’s close enough to me, and I sense suspicion from Hannibal—and also jealousy, because I don’t move away as I’d done with him.

“It was a pleasure getting to know you,” Henri says. He lifts a hand and I feel Hannibal flinch. But I let whatever Henri wants to do happen. He runs the back of his fingers softly along the side of my cheek. “Goodbye, Will.” he says, at last. I hear a tremble in his voice.

“Goodbye, Henri.” I reply.

Hannibal and I watch him leave, and stay standing in the same spot long after he’s gone.

Finally, I gather that enough time has passed for Henri to disappear. I turn to Hannibal. “Where to?” I ask.

He replies with a smile.

*

There are things that need to be said and done before I completely give myself up to Hannibal—it would've been wiser to—but I'm eager to slip away. I'll have to deal with Hannibal—and my feelings towards Hannibal—later in a safe place, without urgency.

Hannibal's Florence apartment is expectedly lavish and is almost too much to take in. I catch myself thinking what it would've been like if I had been here for the past eight months. "Hannibal," I warn. "We have to leave, now." I have a bad feeling about the man in the chapel who had been eyeing me.

Hannibal's in no great hurry. He brings a drink to me, which I take but don't drink. His closeness still terrifies me. He lifts a hand to the side of my face—flashbacks from that night I was gutted play out before my eyes—and I flinch away.

"Will," he says, voice low. I know what he wants to do, with the way that his eyes flicker down to my lips. I almost give in but my body jitters away from him, in obvious fear.

"What would put you at ease?" he asks.

I sigh. If I knew, I'd be the last to know. I chuckle bitterly. "Usually trust needs to be gained," I say. And then: "We gotta go."

Hannibal purses his lips and looks away, deep in thought. And then his eyes flicker with light as if with an idea. He walks away from me—and I don't know where he's going. I follow slowly from behind, wary of this unfamiliar place. He enters a room—the bedroom—and stands beside the bed.

And then he begins taking off his clothes. For a spilt second I feel embarrassed, thinking that maybe Hannibal is only changing. But the way that his hands move, it's obvious that he's putting on a show. For me.

I stay silent, watching uneasily. I don't know what's happening and what I'm supposed to do—or what I *want* to do.

Hannibal slides his shoes off and then he lowers his slacks. I look away, but look back again when he calls my name. I avoid eye contact—instead, vaguely look at his chin—like the good old days. My eyes are burning with wanting to slide down to appreciate his build. To his strong chest, to the hair running down towards his groin. I know my cheeks are colouring.

"Will you come here?" Hannibal asks.

I sway a little, unsure. It takes a lot of strength to finally move my feet. I'm still teetering between running away and never looking back; or running into Hannibal so hard that our collision conjoins us. In end I do go to him, but keep a safe distance. Hannibal takes a step closer, and extends his hand to lift my chin up, to make me look at him in the eyes.

“You see, Will. I’m completely unarmed.” He says. But even when he’s completely naked, the smell of danger still wafts off of him. But I see that his thoughts aren’t sharp and pointy—they’re soft, and pining for something else. He inches his face closer, slowly—until he’s sure that I’m not going to move away.

“May I kiss you, Will?” he asks.

I knew this was going to happen, but the tenderness with which he speaks still takes me aback. “Y-yes.” I say.

Cautiously, I keep my eyes open up until the last second, but as soon as Hannibal’s lips touch mine, I can’t keep from standing straight. He’s gentle at first—he doesn’t want to surprise me. But soon I allow him to pry further and he kisses back more hungrily. It feels like something which could’ve happened a long time ago—it feels like he needs to taste me. Something comes alive in me as he cups my face in his hands. I keep my hands on his hips, increasingly becoming impatient to feel more. Soon, I find my hands clenched into his skin, eager to get as close as possible.

“Hannibal—” I break the kiss, breathing heavily. I sense that he’s aroused—and so am I—but I need to get us out of here, so I pay it no attention. “We have to leave,”

“Yes,” he gasps, but he’s still keeping me imprisoned with his hands around me, holding me tight.

“Let go,” I say. “Or do you want me to fight?”

Hannibal smiles. “How long I’ve waited to feel you like this against me, Will.” he confesses.

I almost fall into the trap. I think that maybe if he had tried to kiss me before…I would’ve let him. “You can do that later,” I say, wrenching myself away from him. “Maybe I’ll even let you do it when I’m undressed.”

Hannibal sighs. “You’re going to spoil me.”

“Get dressed,” I demand, bolting out of the room, because I don’t want to look at him like this—otherwise things might happen. “I’ll be waiting.”

*

Hannibal and I rarely talk through our journey. We take the precaution of keeping distance between us just in case. I’m thankful for it, because I feel shitty and guilty about Henri. I’d basically used him. Bur at times when I turn my gaze to check if Hannibal is still there—I’m always worried he’s gonna leave me, though I know that’s irrational—he offers me a smile. And I know that—even though it doesn't feel like it—that everything is going to be alright.

*

Nighttime in Cuba is pleasant and warm. The future is uncertain but at least the winter wouldn't be as harsh as it was in Virginia. When Hannibal told me about our destination, all I

could do was laugh. Because who would think that Hannibal Lecter would be residing in Cuba of all places?

I spot the house from faraway—it looks more like a dusty shed than a house at first but once we get near, it's sturdy, and just needs cleaning. It's buried deep into the woods—and I imagine I'd have to drive for hours before there'd be a chance that I'd run into another person. But I don't feel panicked when Hannibal finally locks the front door. Instead, I watch as he drops his luggage and assesses his surroundings; his hands itchy with wanting everything cleaned and in order. Our journey has been long, but Hannibal doesn't look tired, as I'm sure I do.

And then he turns to me. We're all alone, at last. For a second I feel a dread, as if he's going to kill me after all—but he approaches and I fall into his arms. His hold is strong but mine is just as enthusiastic. We stay silent like this; breathing in and out into each other, chest to chest.

"I missed you, Will." he whispers in my ear.

"I missed you too," I answer.

*

There is only one bed—Hannibal offers to sleep downstairs on the couch, but I insist we share. I want him close—I don't want to feel alone.

"But do you trust me?" Hannibal asks, straight out.

"Trust you not to stab me?" I retort.

He flinches for a split-second. It's enough to convince me that he won't be harming me anytime soon, if ever.

I try to lighten the mood: "Maybe you can sleep without your clothes on,"

Hannibal lifts a brow.

"That's not a suggestion." I say.

"As you say," he replies, and takes off everything.

"Aren't you going to return the favour?" he asks, as he stands naked before me.

"Only if you ask me to."

"Will, please take off your clothes." he smirks.

I nearly roll my eyes, but do as I'm told. Surprisingly, I'm not as nervous as I thought I'd be. Hannibal watches with cool eyes, tracing his gaze along my body. I jump into bed before he can say anything about the scar. "Come on," I say.

He turns the lights off and slides in beside me. Immediately, I draw closer to Hannibal. I lift his arm and settle it under my neck, and then press my face into his chest. I want to feel my skin against his. After a moment, he lifts his hand and caresses my cheek. And then he turns his face into my hair and nuzzles. I wish I could see his face.

“Goodnight, Will.” he whispers, as he presses a kiss onto my temple.

Exhaustion slip me into sleep, and I finally feel at peace.

*

The pale light is streaming through a slit in the curtains. Hannibal is still beside me, asleep. Something like relief passes over me. I don’t want to break the moment. I wish I could stay like this forever. There hasn’t been any talk of what our future holds; any talk of what meats Hannibal is going to serve me. And how he's going to acquire those meats. I don’t want to think or talk about it so soon. But I’m not urgently feeling disinclined towards it either.

I trace my hand through the hair on his chest. I wonder if I’m taking advantage of him like this when he’s so vulnerable, but then realise that we belong to each other. I’m allowed to do this. I lower my hand down through the centre of his torso, my breath hitching as my hand moves lower still, where the hair is steadily growing thicker. I feel excitement coming awake within me but this has to wait.

Just then, Hannibal nudges awake. “Good morning, Will.” he says, sounding genuinely content.

I retract my hand and place it on his chest. I’m sensing he knows what I’ve been doing but I distract him with a question: “You think we should come clean about some things?” I ask.

Hannibal grunts, and then sighs. A few minutes pass in which he seems to have fallen asleep. But he answers, and for once, Hannibal answers plainly, instead of in metaphors. “Yes, we should.”

“Okay,” I say. “Henri and I…we did get intimate.” I want to get it out of the way.

Hannibal remains silent, as if tossing my confession back and forth in his mind, trying to decide how to feel; or trying to work out what it means.

“Define intimate, please.” he says.

“Uh—we did have sex.” I reply. “What was his name?”

“Did he…penetrate you?” Hannibal asks, flat-out. I can feel his jaw twitching.

“No,” I admit. “But—I asked him to fuck me between my thighs.” I confess.

“Ah,” Hannibal answers. "What were you thinking when you asked him that?"

"I was thinking of you fucking me," I say. "Also, he let me penetrate him once."

Hannibal makes an ambiguous sound.

“How does that make you feel?” I prod. Do I secretly enjoy Hannibal being jealous?

Hannibal sighs. “Make no mistake, Will. I am jealous.” he says. “But I also had a hand in setting into motion these events.”

“Do you forgive me?”

“Yes—and, his name was Antony.”

“And what did he do or not do with you?”

“He let me penetrate him.” he says. "I thought of you every time."

“How many times?” I ask.

“Is that jealousy I hear in your sweet voice?”

“You bet.” I chuckle. “Did he have any violent tendencies—that he was able to tempt Dr. Lecter into his bed?”

“Actually—no.” Hannibal says. “He reminded me of you.”

“Oh?”

“In looks. Not…intellectually.”

“Usually speaking ill of the dead is considered rude.” I say.

“How did you meet him?”

“He—I was walking on the beach late at night and we collided. He kissed me and…I thought he was you, so I followed him.”

Hannibal looks at me with affection.

“I only found out he wasn’t you when…he undressed me noticed the scar.”

Hannibal’s eyes shift lower, to where the scar is, hidden under the covers. He slowly reaches out, and traces his fingers on it. “I’m sorry for this,” he says, softly. “I don’t expect you to forgive me, but I am sorry.”

I place my hand on top of his, and squeeze. “I know.”

End Notes

Please let me know if you spot any grammar/spelling mistakes. Thanks!

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